



FIELDREPORT

Northeast Region • Autumn | Winter 2015



A National Park for Stonewall

For the last several months, NPCA's Northeast office has been engaged in a campaign to designate New York City's Stonewall Inn and Christopher Park as a unit of the National Park Service. These two locations comprise the site of the 1969 uprising in which patrons of the Stonewall Inn, a Greenwich Village gay bar, fought back against ongoing raids by the police. The events marked a turning point in LGBT history, spurring civil rights activists to take a stand against the unjust treatment. Today, the Stonewall site has come to symbolize the struggle for LGBT civil rights across the country and throughout the world.

The bar itself, already recognized by the National Park Service on the National Historic Register, recently obtained landmark status by the City of New York, a sign of its immense value to the LGBT community.

NPCA has been working with a large number of local stakeholders, national LGBT organizations, historians and historic preservationists, elected officials, and members of the Greenwich Village community, as well as Congressman Jerold Nadler (D-NY) for the designation of Christopher Park (across from the Stonewall Inn) as a national monument by President Obama before the end of

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Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area: A Tale of Two Regions

Who knew that just two hours outside of New York City, the 77,000 acre Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area would offer such a prime opportunity for our Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions to combine forces? The Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions have launched a major project to protect and enhance this unique national park. The Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area is an oasis of recreational opportunities for 4 million visitors a year. The area has become a playground for boaters, kayakers, rafters, tubers, swimmers and hikers.

Over the last year our Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions have targeted the problems of a lack of funding, decreased seasonal staff and a significant amount of deferred maintenance projects. We have combined forces to increase community support for the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, especially on the New Jersey side of the Delaware River. By increasing community support, we expect community voices can be amplified to highlight the challenges facing this important park.

The two offices have developed and implemented a plan that increases our presence in the New Jersey gateway communities

adjacent to the park. We joined the local Chamber of Commerce and invited local leaders to work with us and the surrounding communities to produce an economic benefits report entitled *Making Connections*. We are excited by how this economic benefits report has become an important tool to engage community groups and decision makers on both sides of the Delaware River. In fact, our strategy of prioritizing local

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Top: Delaware Water Gap National Recreational Area, New Jersey ©Jon Bilous | Dreamstime.com
Above: View of Pennsylvania from New Jersey side of Delaware Water Gap ©Richard Mirro | ISTOCKPHOTO

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Northeast Parks Needs Assessment

To plot a course for the future, NPCA's Northeast Regional Office, (NERO) undertook an assessment in 2014 and 2015 of Northeast parks. The purpose of the assessment is to determine where NPCA is most needed and where NPCA can most effectively help provide solutions in Northeast national parks. We analyzed 17 out of the 41 national parks within the Northeast region from October 2014 - December 2014 with an emphasis on New England national park units.

NERO found that the issues facing Northeast national parks are common among many regions and reflect systemic challenges. The three major challenges that particularly impact the region include 1) the lack of maintenance funding, 2) the lack of visibility of cultural and historical sites, and 3) the need for stronger partnerships.

THE MOST COMMON OPPORTUNITIES REVEALED THROUGH THIS ASSESSMENT WERE THAT:



Percentage of parks that will benefit from strategies that enhance and support Friends Groups



Percentage of parks that will benefit from the development of stronger local partnerships



Percentage of parks that need better visibility and will benefit from new social media campaigns and other visibility strategies



Percentage of parks that need to address serious maintenance backlog issues.

It appears challenges in Northeast parks have less to do with development pressures and impacts on wildlife and natural resources than in other regions of the country. Still, there is a need to plan for future ecological shifts mainly associated with climate change and human habit. With this shift, NERO has an opportunity to define for the first time, a vision for natural resource management at the region's 36 cultural and historic National Park Service units.

NERO will use this report to help set priorities for the next five years. For a copy please contact Elizabeth Bowler at ebowler@npca.org.



WE'VE MOVED!

The Northeast office has moved! We are proud to announce that we are in our own, new offices in midtown Manhattan. Come visit and learn even more about NPCA's ongoing work in the Northeast region.

HAVE A PHOTO OR COMMENT TO SHARE? We welcome photos from members enjoying national parks, particularly those in the Northeast region. We also appreciate feedback on our Field Report. Share your digital photos, comments, and ideas with us via email: tleonard@npca.org

A Conservation Update on the The Red Knot

A regular avian visitor to Gateway National Recreation Area, Fire Island, and Cape Cod National Seashore, the Western Atlantic subspecies of the Red Knot, *Calidris cantus rufa*, was officially listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act on January 12th, 2015. Joining the ranks of the Piping Plover and the Roseate Tern, this listing will help to protect this unique and iconic shoreline bird for generations to come. The *rufa* Red Knot, a russet-colored sandpiper measuring around 9 to 10 inches in length, can best be seen feeding on newly-laid horseshoe crab eggs during the month of May. Since first put forth for federal protection in September of 2013, the endangered species proposal received over 17,400 individual comments during the public hearing period. The majority of comments were supportive, and some people expressed concern regarding horseshoe crab management, wind turbines,

development, and other factors related to the conservation of this bird.

The only subspecies of Red Knot found on the eastern coast of the Americas, the *rufa* Red Knot is known to have one of the longest migrations of any animal, stretching from southern Chile to their breeding grounds in the Canadian Arctic. One banded bird was even tracked to have flown one-and-a-half times the distance to the moon! This bird lays its eggs in the rocky arctic tundra where it eats insects, beetles, spiders, and other small invertebrates; however, during stops along its migration route, it is fond of muddy, sandy coastal or estuary habitats and feeds on small mollusks, crustaceans, and horseshoe crab eggs. Perhaps the most intriguing characteristic of the Red Knot is a sensory organ in the tips of their bills that allows them to locate prey beneath the sand.

In the mid-2000's, *rufa* Red Knot numbers declined sharply, primarily due to a scarcity of food caused by large harvests of horseshoe crabs in Delaware Bay, an important feeding area for these birds. Horseshoe crabs are an ancient species; at around 450 million years old, they rank among jellyfish and sponges as one of the oldest living groups of animals in existence today. Although they have survived ice ages, asteroids, and other catastrophes, they are currently threatened by human impact. Harvested as bait for American eel and whelk (commonly referred to as "conch"), horseshoe crabs are also prized in the medical industry for their unique copper-based blue blood, which acts as a barrier to bacteria and toxins. Although their blood is harvested using catch-and-release methods, only about 10% to 15% of bled horseshoe crabs survive. Atlantic horseshoe crabs breed in the protected marshes and bays of Gateway National Recreation Area and other coastal sites along the North and Central American coast.



This hearty shorebird is no match for the effects of widespread emerging challenges like climate change and coastal development, coupled with the historic impacts of horseshoe crab overharvesting, which have sharply reduced its population in recent decades

Perhaps the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Dan Ashe, best describes the foundation for the *rufa* Red Knot's threatened species listing: "Unfortunately, this hearty shorebird is no match for the effects of widespread emerging challenges like climate change and coastal development, coupled with the historic impacts of horseshoe crab overharvesting, which have sharply reduced its population in recent decades." It is important that climate change was noted in the listing of the *rufa* Red Knot; this species may be affected by changes in sea level rise, temperature fluctuation, and weather patterns including severe storm surges and hurricanes. These effects of climate change have the potential to affect the *rufa* Red Knot and its food sources, like the horseshoe crab, both in Arctic breeding habitat and in important feeding grounds like Delaware Bay. In fact, Matthias Obst from the University of Gothenburg published a study in 2010 which found a historic decline in horseshoe crabs during previous periods of global warming.

The dynamic between the *rufa* Red Knot, horseshoe crabs, and our own human impacts is an example of how linked these ecological relationships truly are. Sometimes, the effects of our actions are immediate—when we harvest a horseshoe crab for bait, that animal can no longer lay eggs that might feed birds. In the larger picture, that horseshoe crab will not have any further

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offspring to also lay eggs, and so forth. In an even broader context, our environmental impacts leading to climate change may have



unforeseen effects on the *rufa* Red Knot and other species, which will compound and amplify other conservation concerns. There is an inherent uncertainty in the conservation of wildlife—we will likely never understand all of the threats and factors that affect a species and its ecosystem. This uncertainty is the exact reason why protected areas like national parks and seashores are so critical for the conservation of our natural heritage. Protected areas help to retain key habitat areas and important ecological processes that sustain thousands of species of wildlife. They also provide an important opportunity for researchers, naturalists, and interested visitors to gain a better understanding of this ancient and beautiful dance of life, along with many other natural wonders.

At the Northeast Office of NPCA, we have been working on a database to centralize information and research on this species and others as part of the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Resource. We are also creating an informative, interactive StoryMap for the biodiversity of Jamaica Bay. You can learn more about our data centralization project here: www.npca.org/jbwr

Left: Red Knot ©visceralimage | Dreamstime.com
Above: Horseshoe Crab ©roc8jas | Dreamstime.com

his presidency. NPCA has found overwhelming support for this campaign and we have relied on the insights and guidance of our many partners as we move forward. All of these participants are eager to have the chance to accurately tell the Stonewall story and NPCA's Northeast office has been equally excited to help facilitate this campaign.

The campaign celebrated a resounding victory on July 23rd, when New York City's powerful Community Board #2 passed a unanimous resolution in favor of the park's formation. The resolution called for the creation of a working group composed of community members (NPCA will serve as a non-voting member) and also invited the National Park Service to work with local residents to create a site that will tell the LGBT story while preserving Christopher Park's neighborhood charm.

The creation of any new park site requires a massive effort and the dedicated time of many, many people. The NERO office was lucky enough to work with such a large number of Stonewall stakeholders, eager to offer their advice and expertise to the campaign and many of them new to NPCA. September 20th marks the formal launch of our national campaign *A National Park for Stonewall* and we invite you to visit the NPCA website for more information on creating a park for this unique and significant historical site.

**NATIONAL
PARK
—FOR—
STONEWALL**



Above: Stonewall Inn, New York ©NPCA

Find Your Voice for America's National Parks

America's more than 400 national parks protect and preserve some of our most important cultural and historical sites and iconic landscapes. We hike their trails, explore their waters, wander their museums and learn about some of the most pivotal moments in our country's history. Yet these places are facing very real challenges, from encroaching development to climate change to years of underfunding. They need our help.

National Parks Conservation Association's (NPCA) Find Your Voice initiative encourages people to be both national park visitors and national park advocates. Through community service, recreational activities and advocacy trainings, NPCA is working in New York City and across the country to educate, engage and empower people to speak up for America's favorite places so they can thrive into their next century. For more information about NPCA's Find Your Voice initiative, follow the conversation online with #FindYourVoice or visit www.findyourvoice.camp.



So far, the Northeast Region of NPCA has inspired more than 400 New York and New Jersey residents to find their voice for Gateway National Recreation Area with the creation of the Jamaica Bay Advocates—a network that serves as one unified voice to strengthen, protect and restore Jamaica Bay at Gateway. Jamaica Bay Advocates raise awareness on issues facing the park, advocate for more funding for Gateway and help explore ways to improve the visitor experience at Jamaica Bay. Find Your Voice and join the movement to help protect New York's urban national parks with NPCA and the Jamaica Bay Advocates.

Learn more at: www.npca.org/jba.



Pamela Pettyjohn ©NPCA

Meet an Advocate! Pamela Pettyjohn

Pamela joined the *Jamaica Bay Advocates* in February at a Jamaica Bay advocacy event in Brooklyn. In the spring, she attended our Civic Voice Lessons training at Fort Tilden and continues to bring her passion for Jamaica Bay to the surrounding communities by sharing and inviting her peers to join the work that NPCA is leading with our partners at Gateway.

Pamela also teamed up with *Jamaica Bay Advocates* to participate in congressional meetings, urging the New York City delegation to request more federal funding for Gateway National Recreation Area as a part of President Obama's 2017 budget. These much needed funds will help restore a historic bathhouse that was destroyed by Hurricane Sandy, restore West Pond, which is home to many important wildlife species, and make Jamaica Bay more accessible by expanding the city's public transportation routes to include the Bay and Gateway. By funding these three critical projects Jamaica Bay can and should be transformed into a world-class waterfront park.

“Jamaica Bay's waterfront and its natural habitat is a diamond in our backyard. Sandy in all of its destruction has exposed an uncovered gem for us to utilize. Our work is enormous and we cannot do it alone, we need the help of our elected officials. Thankfully, we have representatives like Senator Schumer and Congressman Jeffries championing our cause.”

— PAMELA PETTYJOHN,
PRESIDENT OF CONEY ISLAND BEAUTIFICATION PROJECT, INC.

Pamela's dedication and passion for Jamaica Bay inspires others to find their voice and mobilize to protect New York City's urban national parks. We are honored to have Pamela as a part of our *Jamaica Bay Advocates* network and proudly stand with her to ensure enhancements and long-term preservation efforts continue for Jamaica Bay at Gateway National Recreation Area. Join Pamela and become a Jamaica Bay Advocate! Sign up here: www.npca.org/jba.



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community engagement was so successful that it led to a series of community roundtable meetings this year with interested community stakeholders and representatives from the staff of the National Park Service.

Our goal, on both the issuance of the economic benefit report and the community roundtable meetings, is to help connect the park with the important constituents that support its operations and to enhance our mission by building a new group of advocates for NPCA.

The next step of our engagement strategy is the implementation of a two year grant recently received from the William Penn Foundation. The Geo Tourism grant will allow National Geographic to map destination areas and personal stories of the Delaware Water Gap. This will highlight the fun and value of the Delaware River region. This grant is a great opportunity for NPCA to help sustain and promote the Greater Delaware River area.



Above: Delaware Water Gap ©aimintang | Dreamstime.com

